

Referência:

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ePortfolio: the state of the art in Portugal (from the 1st Meeting in Braga, July).

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Abstract

In the current European context, the ePortfolio emerges as an instrument that facilitates mobility, transparence and acknowledgement of the formal and informal learning developed throughout life.

In Portugal, despite the fact that there is a significant tradition in terms of using portfolios in the educational context, the electronic portfolio has not been object of neither public nor academic discussion. Several questions are thus raised: What is an ePortfolio? Why build ePortfolios? What types of ePortfolios are there? In what contexts is its use justified? How would the common citizen really benefit from it?

In this paper, we critically review the meeting, specifying the accomplishment/evaluation indicators and analyzing the nature of the texts presented, which, in general, reveal some difficulties both in terms of the very conceptualization of the portfolio and in the use/knowledge of specific tools for its implementation.

As far as the Portuguese government's measures are concerned, there is no public initiative concerning specifically the use of ePortfolios, despite the visible efforts of modernization that are being made in the context of the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy and the Technological Plan. However, some intentions of applying the ePortfolios in what concerns the processes of acknowledgement and validation of competences are perceptive.

Text

In Portugal, despite the fact that there is a significant tradition in terms of using portfolios in the educational context, the electronic portfolio has not been object of neither public nor academic discussion. Within this context of relative “silence”, and taking into account the political and pragmatic relevance of the subject, it seemed important for us to promote that discussion.

Several questions are thus raised: What is an ePortfolio? Why build ePortfolios? What types of ePortfolios are there? In what contexts is its use justified? How would the common citizen really benefit from it?

Thus, we organized at University of Minho, in Braga, on the 13th and 14th last July, the “1st Meeting on ePortfolio / Formal and informal learning” with the following purposes: publicizing the European Initiative “Objective 2010: e-Portfolio for All” (EifEL); problematizing the concepts associated with the use of portfolios (in education); joining together the researchers who work in the ePortfolio area, in Portugal, with the purpose of outlining the state of the art in the country; divulging good practices (Higher, Primary, Secondary and Professional Education, RVC Centers); and perspectivating the development and future of the ePortfolio.

The main themes of the meeting matched these purposes, and the papers presented (28 papers) reported formal studies, description of practices in the field as well as conceptual discussions.

In this paper, we critically review the meeting, specifying the accomplishment/evaluation indicators, analyzing the nature of the texts presented, and conjecturing about the possible future of the ePortfolio in Portugal.

1 The Meeting indicators

In what follows, we provide some information concerning the indicators considered.

The Organizing Committee included 7 organizations (2 Universities, 1 Information and Communication Technologies Competence Center, 1 Teacher Training Center, 1 Secondary School, 1 Professional Association and 1 Journal aimed at publicizing educational issues).

The Scientific Committee included 27 members (representing 4 Portuguese Universities and 2 Polytechnic Institutes, 5 foreign Universities from 4 countries – Canada, Belgium, France, Mozambique).

For the plenary lectures 8 speakers were invited: 3 foreigners and 5 Portuguese, 5 scholars, 1 Secondary Education teacher, 1 representative of the Portuguese Institute for Employment and Training Professionals and 1 representative of the Portuguese Government from the Cabinet of the National Coordinator of the Lisbon Strategy and the Technological Plan.

28 papers from various origins were presented, which confirms, as suspected, the diversity of uses of the ePortfolio. From Portugal: 5 Universities, 3 Schools of Education (Polytechnic Institutes), 1 School of Nursing, 2 Secondary Schools, 1 Primary Education School and 1 private school. From abroad: 4 Universities – 2 French, 1 Spanish and 1 Brazilian. In total, the papers represented 17 Institutions.

197 delegates registered for the meeting (10 foreigners from 8 countries) and about 220 people attended it.

Also, a workshop on ELGG platform was made, and proved to be quite successful.

The Meeting was satisfactorily covered by the regional press (3 one page in-depth news reports in two newspapers) and there were innumerable references to it on the Internet.

The final evaluation questionnaire was completed by 138 participants and the results were very positive: 72% of the participants considered the usefulness of the topic to be Very Good and 28% Good (On a scale from Very Good, Good, Satisfactory, and Not Very Satisfactory). From the suggestions presented came out one that consists of making more workshops. This suggestion confirms people's interest in practical activities – hands on –, and demonstrates a certain lack of interest in more theoretical or exclusively theoretical approaches. A Second Meeting was arranged for the next year and the organization will consider this aspect.

The Meeting Proceedings are being prepared and will be available on CDRom before the end of the year. Meanwhile, the abstracts as well as the electronic presentations can be seen on the site <http://www.revista-til.net/afi>.

2 Topics approached

Regarding plenary conferences, and since this is the first meeting, in Portugal, on the subject, we have invited Serge Ravet to present the initiative “ePortfolio for All” (Eifell), Jean-François Ceriser (University of Poitiers) to address the ePortfolio as a research object and Geneviève Jacquinot-Delaunay (Unesco) to establish the due relationship between the eportfolio and the Virtual Campus.

On the other hand, and considering the traditional use of portfolios (non-electronic) in education in this country, we found it is of utmost importance to approach the pedagogical principles inherent to its use (Flávia Vieira, University of Minho), as well as the learning assessment portfolio (Palmira Alves, University of Minho), the modality most commonly used. The ePortfolio in professional training (Eusébio Machado, professor and trainer) was also addressed, and it became clear that no specific platform in this area is used yet.

Regarding the use of e-portfolios in recognizing and validating competences, José Leitão, from Institute for Employment and Training Professionals was not able to be present, but made us know that it is expected that that use will soon be put into practice, when the validation of competences equivalent to the 12th grade is implemented.

Finally, the representative of Cabinet of the National Coordinator of the Lisbon Strategy and the Technological Plan (António Bob Santos), presented the Technological Plan as framed by the contribute of the ICT for lifelong learning. He referred the importance of the ePortfolio in this respect, but did not mention the existence of any specific public initiative dedicated to it.

As for the papers presented, as we have already said, were much diversified in terms of their provenience.

The Meeting's thematic lines contemplated: 1) ePortfolio in education (in all the grades of elementary school, in secondary school, higher education and professional education); 2) ePortfolio in training; 3) ePortfolio in the Recognition and Validation of Competences (RVC); 4) Professional ePortfolio and/or of personal development; and 5) Portfolio in traditional format (in paper format and on any of the levels or teaching modalities).

There were papers dwelling on all thematic lines except RVC.

On the other hand, formal studies, description of field practices or well-founded and referenced conceptual discussions were accepted. With the exception of two papers of theoretical nature, and a simple report of a field experience, the remaining papers relate studies more or less formal, within the framework of academic activities (studies by scholars or postgraduate studies).

Of a total of 28 papers presented, 21 referred to experiences within the scope of higher education, 3 were related to the second stage of basic education (primary school), 2 were on the third stage of basic education (7-9th grades) and no experience regarding secondary school was related (10-12th grades).

That is to say that, in Portugal, seemingly, the use either of portfolios or ePortfolios is much centred upon the field of Education, and particularly on the field of initial and continuing training of

teachers (10 papers). Special emphasis must be given to the presentation of the Digifolio project, an European project coordinated by Portugal (University of Lisbon) and dedicated to the digital portfolio as a strategy for the professional development of teachers. This project has several activities in motion, and among them the preparation of a training course on digital portfolios.

There was also a paper on nurse training and 3 on the arts field.

Within the scope of promoting a greater job access through the ePortfolio it was presented only a post-doctoral project, making use of the ELGG platform (High School of Education of Santarém, responsible for the dynamisation of the workshop on the ELGG, at the Meeting).

With a few exceptions, in general, the texts presented reveal some difficulties both in terms of the very conceptualization of the portfolio and in the use/knowledge of specific tools for its implementation. It is possible to reach the conclusion that, besides the ELGG platform, no other specific platform of ePortfolio is used in Portugal. In the cases where it was possible to consider the practice of ePortfolio, there are referrals to other tools that enable but were not conceived for that purpose. On the other hand, three technical papers (system interoperability specifications) were presented, two from University of Minho and one from University of Paris 8 (France). One of these papers mentions a platform created at University of Minho (“Degóis”) which, having been initially developed as a dynamic platform for making scientific curricula available, reveals strong characteristics of a potential model, mainly in technical terms.

3 Final remarks

We believe that there is in Portugal a rather stirring interest concerning the digital portfolio, to which this Meeting conferred some visibility, something we consider to be extremely necessary. Given the fact that the generalization of the use of these portfolios is a strategic option for Europe, we feel there’s a lack of definition, from the national entities, concerning the matter.

Anyway, it is obvious that, in the short term and with the information we now have, the most significant implementations will surely come from the academia: both in what concerns the uses in terms of education and training and the development of platforms.

The implementation of the use of eportfolios does not seem to be much viable, both because of the very curricular structure at these education levels and the still insufficient penetration of computers and the Internet (notwithstanding increasing progresses). However, taking into account our knowledge of the research and development dynamics in Portugal in the field of the information

systems, and given the context of strong governmental incentive for this area, we believe that systems can be rapidly created that will certainly move forward to the corporations' milieu, and that can exert a strong impact on the desired generalization of greater access to jobs.

The Meeting scheduled for next year will, for sure, account for this evolution.